

THE PRACTICAL AND EXISTENTIAL SENSE OF THE BIBLICAL VERB 'ΑΓΑΠῆΝ, AS EXPLAINED BY ITS OCCURENCES IN LXX*

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Rezumat: Încercarea de față e o incursiune în profunzimea misterului iubirii, cu mijloacele studiului concordanței biblice. Fără a avea pretenția de a epuiza tema, ea încearcă să lămurească unele aspecte ale iubirii biblice, căutând să contureze bazele unei argumentări a posibilității unei angajări plenare, nealterate nici de o supradoză a simțămintelor, nici de egoismul reflectat în doi. *Biblia* călăuzește spre o astfel de iubire plenară, definind-o treptat, chiar prin afectele naturale ale acestei lumi. De aceea, ἀγάπη nu este un termen specializat, ci acoperă noțiunea largă a unei iubiri omenești raționale, a cărei utilitate e însă judecată prin prisma avantajelor și a dovezilor palpabile – ceea ce face ca exprimarea ei adecvată să fie cea la timpul trecut, mai degrabă decât la prezent. Cercetarea a fost făcută cu mijloace mai ales occidentale, tocmai pentru a constitui și temeiul unei replici față de o anume tendință superficială din spațiul occidental (protestant) de a acuza celibatul mistic de înstrăinarea de iubire – când el poate fi tocmai calea unei iubiri împlinite plenar, după standardele *Vechiului și Noului Testament*.

Cuvinte-cheie: Eros și Agape, porunca iubirii, *Septuaginta*, *Leviticul*, *Epistola Sf. Iacob*.

The manner of understanding the biblical love has implications for the translation of various scriptural passages, as well as for real life. If we look at Ps. 67/68:6-7, for instance, we see that a British traditional reading (in Protestant spirit) seems to suggest that God would occupy Himself with the marriage of those *in danger* of celibacy: “God setteth the solitary in families” (KJV), and even with the remarriage of the divorced, according to the radical confessional translation of Cornilescu, “Dumnezeu dă o familie celor părăsiți” (CNS), which follows the rendering of Segond, “Dieu donne une famille à ceux qui étaient abandonnés” (LSG), in interpreting the ‘house’, בית (LXX: οἶκος) as ‘family’, while the anchoritism is condemned by the Occidental and Masoretic sequel of the verse: “but the rebellious dwell in a dry land” (KJV); “les rebelles seuls habitent des lieux arides” (LSG); “numai cei răsvrățiți locuiesc în locuri uscate” (CNS). However, the traditional Eastern reading of the text¹ does not support such primacy of the conjugal love.

* *Sensul practic și existențial al verbului biblic ἀγαπῆν, așa cum este el explicat de ocurențele în Septuaginta.*

¹ LXX: ὁ θεὸς κατοικίζει μονοτρόπους ἐν οἴκῳ ἐξάγων πεπεδημένους ἐν ἀνδρείᾳ, ὁμοίως τοὺς παραπικραίνοντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐν τάφοις. LXE: “God settles the solitary in a house; leading forth prisoners mightily, also them that act provokingly, even them that

As for the love towards God, things are not clearer either, as can be seen from the reading of a *New Testament* passage² like Luke 7:36-50, where, in verse 47, Jesus says to the woman who anointed His feet with ointment: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; *for she loved much*” (KJV) – Gr. ὅτι ἠγάπησεν πολύ. On the face of it, the verb *she loved* may seem to be in a wrong tense here, because of either a mistranslation, or an ellipsis – as the note in NET Bible (included in Bible Works 9) explains. Yet, perhaps the logic of this passage might be better understood with the help of another passage, to some extent similar (Mark 2:7-12³), where Jesus had to produce a proof to those who were reasoning in their hearts: “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” and He said: “That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately *he arose* (ἠγέρθη), took up the bed, and went forth before them all” (KJV). We can see here that an aorist was necessary, because it expressed an evidence. So, we shouldn’t rush to think that it’s just an irrelevant Greek or Hebrew manner of speaking, since there clearly must be a *past tense*.

Now, let’s look from another angle: how come that love can be talked of in the past tense? Isn’t it eternal? And especially, isn’t it in the present tense? How odd to see that in the *Septuagint Psalms* (which for the Eastern Church is still a *Jewish* made translation) declarations of love towards God are made either in a past tense (indicative aorist) or in the future. “I have loved (ἠγάπησα) the Lord, [+ a REASON:] because he will hear (εἰσακούσεται) the voice of my supplication” (Ps. 114/116:1)⁴, or “I will love thee (ἀγαπήσω σε), O Lord, my strength” (Ps. 17/18:1 – KJV). Love in present tense is only a rare exception in the *Bible* (will be discussed later), and we already see that this bears a relation to giving some proofs or reasons⁵.

Let’s imagine how would this kind of declarations sound towards a woman, now: – *Do you love me, darling?* – *I will love you.* Or: – *I loved you.* (Or: *I loved you. Marry me.*) In this sphere, the suitable approach is obviously the one expressed in the well-known song of Elvis Presley: “It’s Now or Never”⁶. In other words, in the usual love between man and woman, it is the present that matters. On the

dwell in tombs.” Romanian Synodal translation (B 2014): “Dumnezeu aşază pe cei singuratici în casă, scoate cu vitejie pe cei legați în obezi, la fel pe cei amărâți, pe cei ce locuiesc în morminte.”

² As a matter of fact, the passage which actually triggered this investigation.

³ See also Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26.

⁴ The literal translation. However, Brenton’s version reads here: “I am well pleased, because the Lord will hearken to the voice of my supplication” (Ps. 116:1 – LXE). LXX (Ps. 113:26): ἠγάπησα ὅτι εἰσακούσεται Κύριος τῆς φωνῆς τῆς δεήσεώς μου.

⁵ Which I will keep on highlighting below, in order to point out the practical framework.

⁶ “It’s now or never,/ come hold me tight/ Kiss me my darling,/ be mine tonight/ Tomorrow will be too late,/ *it’s now or never/ My love won’t wait.*”

distinction between these two kinds of love there is also an entire literature. Let's have a look at some of the most important of its approaches.

Denis de Rougemont, in his influential *L'amour et l'occident*, analyses myths and love stories like Tristram's and Romeo's, in comparison to the *Gospel*. And he even jumps to the paradoxical conclusions (maybe a little bit far-fetched, in my opinion) that the courtly love of the troubadours is somehow connected with the heresy of cathares ("La mystique d'Occident est une autre passion dont le langage métaphorique est parfois étrangement semblable à celui de l'amour courtois", Rougemont 1939, 210) and that any form of "mysticism" (for him, something not serious) derives by inversion from the pagan worship of Eros (but he mentions only Meister Eckhart as example of dark mystic bachelor). He has a very interesting and very well written final chapter (*Éros sauvé par Agapè*), which has been referred to by many other important scholars, and where he explains:

Alors l'amour de charité, l'amour chrétien, qui est Agapè, paraît enfin dans sa pleine stature: il est l'affirmation de l'être. Et c'est Éros, l'amour-passion, l'amour païen, qui a répandu dans notre monde occidental le poison de l'ascèse idéaliste. [...] Éros s'asservit à la mort parce qu'il veut exalter la vie au-dessus de notre condition finie et limitée de créatures. [...] Agapè sait que la vie terrestre et temporelle ne mérite pas d'être adorée, ni même tuée, mais peut être acceptée dans l'obéissance à l'Éternel. [...] L'homme naturel était condamné à croire Éros, c'est-à-dire à se confier dans son désir le plus puissant, à lui demander la délivrance. [...] Et qu'aurions-nous alors à craindre du désir? Cela seulement: qu'il nous détourne d'obéir. Mais il perd sa puissance absolue quand nous cessons de le diviniser. Et c'est ce qu'atteste l'expérience de la fidélité dans le mariage. Car cette fidélité se fonde justement sur le refus initial et jure de «cultiver» les illusions de la passion, de leur rendre un culte secret, et d'en attendre un mystérieux surcroît de vie. [...] L'exercice de la fidélité envers une femme accoutume à considérer les autres femmes d'une manière tout à fait nouvelle, inconnue du monde de l'Eros: comme des personnes, non plus comme des reflets ou des objets (Rougemont 1939, 312-315).

Apart from his interesting observations and his intention to defend Christianity (which, however, he boils down to the *triomphe d'Agape sur Eros*), the problem is, though, that it almost seems like Christ came to Earth and died on the cross just to save Mr. Rougemont from divorce, not to give us the eternal life, where there will be no marriage. In that case what about the brotherly *agape* or the *agape* between man and God, if *agape* is conceived only as reduced to family?

Another important book, *The Four Loves*, by the influential (in many fields) C. S. Lewis, divides the *love* even into four, according to the four related Greek verbs: Besides ἐράω/ ἔραμαι and ἀγαπάω/ ἀγαπᾶν (referring to charity), he also mentions φιλέω (referring to friendship) and στέργω (referring to affection, „especially of parents to offspring”, Lewis 1960, 42) – rather a case of excessive respect for the original language of revelation. He too has an excellent writing style and some brilliant observations, yet the chapter about *agape* (or *charity*) is (not surprisingly) the shortest and the most conventional. Lewis is very careful to say that “the act of

Venus is not too trivial to be transformed in a work of Charity” (Lewis 1960, 152) and to disagree with the “medieval guides” because they were all celibates, and therefore couldn’t understand Eros and sexuality (ibid., 112). In fact he too tries to describe, like Denis de Rougemont, whom he quotes, *agape* as a sort of perfection in marriage⁷.

Another important book on this topic is *Agape and Eros*, by Anders Nygren – who, as a Professor of Systematic Theology, wrote a serious treaty, in three volumes, about what he calls “the Christian idea of love” (Nygren 1953, 27), or “the idea of Agape in Christianity” (ibid., 41) – which is “a technical term introduced by Paul” (ibid., 114). He clearly separates it from *eros*, which, in “fundamental contrast” to *agape* (ibid., 200), is “acquisitive and egocentric” (ibid., 175, 179), stating that *eros* and *agape* belong to two entirely separate spiritual worlds, and “they do not represent the same value in their respective contexts, so that they cannot in any circumstances be rightly substituted for one another” (ibid., 31) – in this, relying on the “fact that when the New Testament speaks of love it makes large use of the word *agape*, but consistently avoids the word *eros*” (ibid., 33)⁸ (resting only upon *New Testament* Greek – due to an excessive conception that imagines a sort of linguistic isle).

D. A. Carson will take a closer look at biblical occurrences, so that to gainsay Lewis and Nygren, who “have tried to assign the love of God and, derivatively, Christian love to one particular word group”, and have wrongly discriminated between ἐρώω, as referring to “sexual” or “erotic love”, φιλέω, as referring to “emotional love” (of “friendship and feeling”), and ἀγαπάω, referring to “willed love”, or “willed self-sacrifice for the good of another”, which, by contrast, would have “no emotional component, however generous” (Carson 2000, 30⁹). Carson doesn’t make the occidental linguistic dichotomy between *Old* and *New Testament* and his analysis reveals that in LXX ἀγαπάω is used even for the “vicious act, transparently sexual”, of Amnon¹⁰, and in the *New Testament* ἀγαπάω is used

⁷ However, one of his remarks might be relevant for our investigation: he distinguishes between the Need-love (of a child for his mother) and the Gift-love (of a man who works for the well being of his family) – both of them legitimate (Lewis 1960, 9). He notes (ibid., 21) that “when Need-pleasures are in question we tend to make statements in the past tense. The thirsty man who has just drunk off a tumbler of water may say, *By Jove, I wanted that*” (like in our case). The love between God and man also has the form of a Need-love, since man was created to be a son of God, and God became somehow the Son of mankind.

⁸ Eventually, as a bishop, he tries to make the love denominationally correct (*agape* can only be found within his own denomination).

⁹ He also adds (Carson 2000, 20-21) that love means choosing, like in Deut. 10:14-15, so this is the way we should understand Jesus’ love for the Church in Eph. 5:25 – from where he, too, comes to linking biblical love with Protestantism.

¹⁰ See the story of what appears to be the rape of his half-sister Tamar in 2Sam. 13. On the other hand, ἐρώω can be found in places more honourable than that – like Prov. 4:6 (the

interchangeably with φιλέω: the Father loves the Son with both verbs (John 3:35, 5:20). In Luke 22:47, even Judas *loves* Jesus (as φιλέω is used for its second meaning of kissing) (ibid., 31), while in 2Tim. 4:10 Paul blames the bad *love* (ἀγάπη) towards this world. Therefore, he notes the commonsensical fact that the Greek dictionary has nothing to do with the nature of love (since the verbs happen to be mixed up in the *Bible*). So, even though ἀγαπάω word group may have been selected to be filled with a special signification because it was less used, he disputes that it is a technical term which could be reduced to willed altruism (as one observes in 1Cor. 13), and he also rejects the practice of “importing the entire semantic range of a word into that word in a particular context” (Carson 2000, 31-33). He exemplifies with the very convention of sentimentalizing God (ibid., 14) in Protestant churches (where God’s love became predictable, ever since Luther and Calvin), which led to the situation where “the widely disseminated belief in the love of God is set with increasing frequency in some matrix other than biblical theology” (ibid., 10).

In fact, many scholars treat love as an abstract concept (identified with a general Christianity), completely separated from context, analysed in the same way as any pagan term, except that it formally relies on the idea that “God is love” (1John 4: 8, 16), and not any love but ἀγάπη-love, which, because it is a commandment, it must be some sort of general social duty.

As to really define love is in fact impossible (once we accepted that God Himself is love), the best thing we can do would be to look at what *Scripture* teaches us about it, gradually defining the concept, and making clearer the meaning of commands: “Love thy God” (Deut. 6:5) and “Love thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:18).

Love in *Pentateuch*

Genesis begins by illustrating ἀγαπάω (ἀγαπᾶν) through man’s most important but ordinary and natural desires and pleasures.

A. Love for the offspring¹¹

1. “And He said, Take thy son, the beloved one, whom thou hast loved [τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν ὃν ἠγάπησας (LXX)¹²], Isaac, and go into the high land, and offer him there for a whole-burnt-offering on one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Gen. 22:2 – LXE).

2. “And Isaac loved (ἠγάπησεν) Esau, [+ a REASON:] *because he did eat of his venison*, but Rebekah loved (ἠγάπα) Jacob” (Gen. 25:28 – KJV) – the difference from the Hebrew verb בָּהַן is minor, but here LXX differs in the sense that it tries to theologially shrink from saying that Isaac really *loved* a food (see Gen. 27:4, 9 and 14), so it employs φιλέω.

generic love for wisdom), or Est. 2:17 (king Artaxerxes’ love for Esther), where the same Hebrew verb בָּהַן is used, and the same framework of proofs as for the ἀγαπᾶν.

¹¹ Which is not στοργή, like in Lewis’ view.

¹² MT: בָּהַן-רָשָׁה. KJV: “whom thou lovest”.

3. “Now Israel loved (ἠγάπα) Joseph more than all his children, because [+ REASON – at least according to his brothers:] he was the son of his old age and [a PROOF:] he made him a coat of many colours” (Gen. 37:3 – KJV)¹³.

B. *The love towards the woman is introduced as a reflection of the same type of love above*

1. “And [PROOF:] Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her (ἠγάπησεν αὐτήν); and [REASON:] Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (Gen. 24:67 – KJV). Thus, the love of Isaac for his woman Rebecca is proven by the place she is given (the tent of his mother). As a comparison, one couldn’t say that Adam does love Eve. She is simply there, build to be naturally loved. Eve even lost something when she was *known* (rather a disparaging word, which sounds as if he has found out – impetuously – what she was trying to hide, a sort of emptiness: now she isn’t surprising for Adam anymore). Isaac didn’t *know* Rebecca (his second mother), but *loved* her.

2. “And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days [PROOF:], for the love he had to her” (παρὰ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν αὐτὸν αὐτήν – LXX) (Gen. 29:20 – KJV).

3. “And Leah conceived, and [REASON:] bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me” (νῦν με ἀγαπήσει ὁ ἀνὴρ μου) (Gen. 29:32 – KJV).

4. After humbling Dinah by laying with her, the soul of Shechem “clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved (ἠγάπησεν) the damsel, and [PROOF:] spake kindly unto the damsel. And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife” (Gen. 34:2-4 – KJV).

After these examples of natural love, before giving the commandment of love, the book of *Exodus* instructs us about how profitable it is to love God, Who describes Himself as “shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσίν με), and [PROOF:] keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:6 – KJV).

In contrast, we are also shown how man can wrongly invest an overdose of his natural love (instead of it being a pedagogue to the divine – and saving – love): we are given the example of a man who loves his kind master, his lovely wife and children more than his own liberty. “And if the servant shall plainly say: I love (ἠγάπηκα) my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free” (Ex. 21:5 – KJV) – his ear was to be pierced, so that it wouldn’t hear words about freedom anymore, as a patristic commentary explains¹⁴.

¹³ Something similar, in Gen. 44:20.

¹⁴ (By a monk.) “La fel și robul care-și iubește stăpânul, femeia și copiii, renunțând la libertatea adevărată pentru legătura cu cele trupești, se face rob veșnic. De aceea i-a fost găurită urechea cu sula, ca nu cumva, auzind prin deschizătura firească a auzului, să primească vreun gând de libertate, ci să rămână neconținut rob, iubind cele de aici”. (Nil Ascetul 1947, 201) [= Likewise, the slave who loves his master, wife and children, renouncing the true freedom for the sake of the bond with carnal things, makes himself an eternal slave. That is why his ear was pierced with the awl, lest, hearing through the

We can see that all loves are considered of the same nature – as the soul of man is one. So, the first and main danger for man’s soul is loving others too much, and not being selfish enough to preserve his own pursuit for the good.

The opposite danger, too much selfishness, is shown as well in the next book, *Leviticus*. Here we find the commandment: ἀγαπήσεις αὐτὸν (τὸν πλησίον σου) ὡς σεαυτὸν, given against two types of such excesses:

1. *Hate*: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people [COUNTERPROOF], but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. 19:18 – KJV).

2. *Lack of care for the vulnerable and the weak*: “But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you [PROOF], and thou shalt love him as thyself” (Lev. 19:34 – KJV). Here, the exegetes have noticed that the word *neighbour* “refers to a wide range of persons with whom Israel would have had relationships”. “The persons Israel is obligated to care for” were described as: the *fellow citizen*, the *neighbour*, the *labourer*, the *poor*, the *alien*, the *deaf* and the *blind* (Balentine 2000, 165.)¹⁵.

In the next book, *Deuteronomy*, we are finally given *the love for God* as a commandment – in close connection with the previous one (of loving the neighbour) – without the latter, the former could have been misleading, misunderstood and misdosed. Only if we love God (and God’s image in our neighbour) we will know to share with the neighbor *our good*, not *our evil or sin* (according to Ben Azzai – see Milgrom 2000, 1656 and Balentine 2002, 165-166).

First of all, we are shown that God loved first:

The Lord chose your fathers to love (ἀγαπᾶν) them, and [PROOF:] He chose out their seed after them, even you, beyond all nations, as at this day [...] executing judgment for the stranger and orphan and widow, and He loves (ἀγαπᾷ)¹⁶ the stranger [PROOF:] to give him food and raiment (Deut. 10:15, 18 – LXE).

The man’s answer, therefore, is supposed to be commensurate:

3a. Therefore thou shalt love (ἀγαπήσεις) the Lord thy God, and [PROOF:] shalt observe his appointments, and his ordinances, and his commandments, and his judgments, always [...]. 3b. Now if ye will indeed hearken to all the commands which I charge thee this day, to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the Lord thy God, and [PROOF:] to serve him

natural aperture of the hearing, he receives any thought of freedom, but to remain perpetually a slave, since he loves things from hence].

¹⁵ He also says that “the word *love* implies both attitude and act; one must not only feel love but also act in ways that translate love into concrete deeds”. Atkinson (1965, 108) adds that “In *Old Testament* days the neighbour was opposed to the enemy and it is easy to see in the very words of the present verse that he was limited to «the children of thy people»”. But only under the *Gospel* all limitation are “swept away” and „this commandment applied internationally” (ibid., 108).

¹⁶ As regards God, the present tense, which denotes continuous or repeated action, will do equally well.

with all thy heart, and with all thy soul [...]. **3c.** If ye will indeed hearken to all these commands, which I charge thee to observe this day, to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the Lord our God, and [PROOF:] to walk in all his ways, and to cleave close to him. (Deut. 11:1, 13, 22 – LXE).

Moreover, in His philanthropy, God offers additional reward for man's answer.

4a. If thou shalt hearken to do all these commands, which I charge thee this day, to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the Lord thy God, [PROOF:] to walk in all his ways continually, [REWARD:] thou shalt add for thyself yet three cities to these three. **4b.** And the Lord shall purge thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, [REWARD:] that thou mayest live. (Deut. 19:9, 30:6 – LXE).

And likewise, in *Joshua*, it is shown further on what the received command of love means, in its full content.

1. But take great heed to do the commands and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you to do; to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the Lord our God, [PROOF:] to walk in all his ways, to keep his commands, and to cleave to him, and serve him with all your mind, and with all your soul. **2.** And take ye great heed to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the Lord our God. [COUNTERPROOF] For if ye shall turn aside and attach yourselves to these nations that are left with you, and make marriages with them, and become mingled with them and they with you... (Jos. 22:5, 23:11-12 – LXE)

Love as performance

As it was observed, love can be commanded like that because it signifies not only an emotion or attitude, but also deeds. With respect to the neighbour, the command means *do good unto him as you would do for yourself*, actively seeking the good of your brother. In actual fact, in biblical contexts, love also “carries precise legal meaning: preference and promotion to an exclusive status of primacy” – as can be seen in the case of the natural paradigm of love (about wives). While its antonym, hate, denotes “the legal status of divorce. One’s love towards one’s lord or spouse requires some form of contractual obligation, whereas hate involves a formal renunciation of such responsibility” (Milgrom 2000, 1653-1654¹⁷). Following the

¹⁷ There, concerning Lev. 19:18 and 34, he also says: “How can love be commanded? The answer simply is that the verb *ahab* signifies not only an emotion or attitude, but also deeds.” Actually, the love that *Deuteronomy* speaks about is a “covenantal love”, like in *Genesis* 29:30-33, when Jacob “loves” Rachel and “hates” Leah, and “the reference is to the legal status of the two wives rather than Jacob’s emotion toward them”. The author also notes that every time the Hebrew *’ahab* takes the preposition *le*, “*’ahab le* implies doing, not feeling”. So, when (in verses 33-34) “applied to the alien, it means to do him good, to treat him kindly”.

same pattern, *Bible* is making itself increasingly clear about the content of love between man and God. Since any claimed love must always be supported by some practical evidence, man loves God *and* serves Him and obeys His commandments, while God loves man *and* protects him with His mighty hand – therefore, a most profitable contract and a compelling choice for any free man.

Since it must be conceived in this framework of evidences, love is necessarily talked about in a past tense. The Hebrew suffix conjugation *qatal* points to “the past time”, to “a completed action, and expresses a fact” (MIBH, 82), being almost always translated into Greek by the *punctiliar* aorist (while *yiktol* is translated mostly by future). In his investigation on the verbal aspect, Buist Fanning made the useful distinction between verbs that are “activities” and “performances”, or, as he puts it, “actions which are *unbounded*” (activities) and “actions which are *bounded*” (performances): “the difference between bounded and unbounded expressions focuses on whether the expression includes a limit or terminus for the action or not”, “a terminal point at which the action is *finished*, not just *ended*” (Fanning 1990, 140-141). His only error is that he includes biblical ἀγαπάω among the “verbs of active cognition, mental attitude, or emotional state” (ibid., 145). Actually, in his terms, the biblical or ‘covenantal love’ falls into the category of performances¹⁸ (best described in past tense). The *Historical Books*, *Psalms* and *Prophets* never allow us to think love is a mere emotional state or an empty word. In *Malachi*, for instance, God can be even asked how did He show His love:

I have loved you (ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς), saith the Lord. And ye said, Wherein hast thou loved us (ἐν τίνι ἠγάπησας ἡμᾶς)? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and hated Esau (ἠγάπησα τὸν Ἰακώβ, τὸν δε Ἡσαυ ἐμίσησα) and [COUNTERPROOF] laid waste his borders, and made his heritage as dwellings of the wilderness? (Mal. 1:2-3 – LXE).

A consequence of the identity in nature of all loves¹⁹ is that since (as we saw in Deut. 11:3 and Josh. 22:5) what is required from us is to love God with all heart – and, as Ben Azzai interprets it, *we are all one body*²⁰ –, there will be no room left in our heart but to love others as ourselves. *Bible* gives us some relevant examples of men who deviated from this equilibrium framework.

And it came to pass after this that he loved (ἠγάπησεν) a woman in Alsorech, and her name was Dalida [...] And Dalida said to Sampson, How sayest thou, I love thee

¹⁸ However, in a personal conversation we had, he admitted this, accepting that „there comes a moment when love must be proven”.

¹⁹ Which can sometimes make God *jealous* (Ex. 20:5, Ez. 36:6 and so on).

²⁰ “First, make such a (and every) person aware of the fact that he is of ultimate worth because he bears the likeness of God” – see Milgrom (2000, 1656). And E. Ullendorff even suggested that *as yourself* (kāmōkā) would be a brachylogy for *he is yourself*, and a version of the *Bible* (NEB) reflects his view – see ibid., 1655.

(more rigorously: I loved thee – ἠγάπηκά σε), when thy heart is not with me? this third time thou hast deceived me, and hast not told me wherein is thy great strength (Judg. 16:4, 15 – LXE).

Solomon loved (ἠγάπησεν) the Lord, so as to [PROOF:] walk in the ordinances of David his father [...] [*But, in the same time,*] of the nations concerning whom the Lord forbade the children of Israel, saying, Ye shall not go in to them, and they shall not come in to you, lest they turn away your hearts after their idols: Solomon clave to these in love (τοῦ ἀγαπήσαι) (1Kings 3:3, 11:2 – LXE).

Of course, there exists, for man, even a fall down to a sinful ἀγάπη, that is only used in present indicative form (as in the case of Amnon, mentioned above): “And he said to him, What ails thee that thou art thus weak? O son of the king, morning by morning? wilt thou not tell me? and Amnon said, I love (ἀγαπῶ) Themar the sister of my brother Abessalom” (2Sam. 13:4 – LXE).

To the kind master, the wife or other women, the children, we could also add the friends, and even the poor “lame and blind” – David’s enemies, in that they appeal to his feelings in order to deter him from doing his duty (2Sam. 5:8).

David and *Psalms*

So, there can also exist worldly incomplete loves (based on various reasons, more or less strong). David is loved by Saul (1Sam. 16:21), Jonathan (18:1), Michal (18:20), and all Israel, “because he led them in their campaigns” (18:16 – LXE). And David calls Saul and Jonathan: “Saul and Jonathan, the beloved (οἱ ἠγαπημένοι) and the beautiful” (2Sam. 1:23 – LXE), saying, about Jonathan (2Sam. 1:26): “I am grieved for thee, my brother Jonathan; thou wast very lovely to me; thy love to me was wonderful beyond the love of women” (ἡ ἀγάπησίς σου ἔμοι ὑπὲρ ἀγάπησιν γυναικῶν) – a comparison only possible if there is a similarity of kind between the respective loves (which differ in degree).

As for David himself, he anticipates somehow the renewed commandment of Christ, reaching a superior and noble love, beyond direct reasons:

For as much as thou lovest them that hate thee, and hatest them that love thee (τοῦ ἀγαπᾶν τοὺς μισοῦντάς σε καὶ μισεῖν τοὺς ἀγαπῶντάς σε); and [*alleged PROOF:*] thou hast this day declared, that thy princes and thy servants are nothing in thy sight: for I know this day, that if Abessalom were alive, and all of us dead to-day, then it would have been right in thy sight. (2Sam. 19:6 – LXE)

In the *Psalms*, love finally attains conceptualization: besides the direct declaration of love mentioned above (Ps. 17/18:1, 114/116:1), we also read that God loves concepts like *righteousness* and *justice*, and hates *wickedness*, while man loves God’s *law*, God’s *commandments*, God’s *salvation* and *truth*. In these terms, the two risks for man are to love vain things: “O ye sons of men, how long will ye be slow of heart?

wherefore do ye love (ἀγαπᾶτε) vanity, and seek falsehood?” (Ps. 4:2 – LXE)²¹, and ultimately, even bad things: “thou hast loved (ἠγάπησας) wickedness more than goodness; unrighteousness better than to speak righteousness” (Ps. 52:3 – LXE); or, on the other hand, to love ἐν τῷ στόματι, without the required proofs: “they loved Him (*only*) with their mouth (ἠγάπησαν αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν), and lied to Him with their tongue” (Ps. 77/78:36 – LXE)²².

New Testament as an epilogue

Jesus says that the two *agapes*, towards God and the neighbour, are the essence of the Law. The verb ἀγαπᾶν is still used in the same way in the NT: in the past tense – with marginal (mostly negative) exceptions. Peter did not dare to answer Jesus, in the present, ἀγαπῶ σε, but φιλῶ σε (John 21:15 – KJV), when he couldn’t show any evidence for it: “So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me (ἀγαπᾷς με) more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee (φιλῶ σε)”.

In *James’ Epistle* we find again, probably the most clearly expressed, the practical conception of the love commanded in the *Old Testament*. The brother of the Lord, who, like Jude and Matthew, wrote for the Jews and is a non-dogmatic author (Sadler 1895, xii)²³, invokes “the royal law” (James 2:8, which quotes Lev. 19:18)²⁴, against Christians who show favoritism towards the rich, and in this way “despise the poor” (2:6), even though they bless God with their tongue (3:9). In his view, those who really obey the *royal law* shouldn’t be deceived by their own desires (1:15), curse men (3: 9) or boast and ignore God (4:13). James’ theme is *defiance of the tyranny of the present*, by all those who act as “lovers of God” (1:12), according to “the law of liberty” (1:25). His call for converting those who “err from the truth”

²¹ Here, the present tense is appropriate, due to the worldly context.

²² Here, Rahlfs’ edition of *Septuagint* reads ἠπάτησαν ‘deceived’, without even signalling out that back in *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus* we have ἠγάπησαν (most probably, the correct reading).

²³ Which is natural, since it would have sounded weirder for James to say *my brother made the heavens and earth*, while it was more convenient for him to say: *my brother taught us virtue*.

²⁴ He also uses thrice ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί (‘my beloved brethren’ – KJV), which may seem an equivalent to a formal greeting, ‘my fellows’, or as a mark of a transition to new subject matter (Hartin 2003, 95), which introduces a new topic (Moo 2000, 81 and Loh/Hatton 1997, 41) or even ‘gentle’ and ‘silken words’ (Manton 1842, 90). Yet, keeping in mind who the author is – the Just himself, who was tempted by telling him “thou respectest not persons”, and who gave testimony of Jesus, being killed by the Scribes and Pharisees, according to the Hegesippus’ chronicle preserved by Eusebius (*History*, II, 23 – *apud* Sadler 1895, viii-ix) – he may be credited with the proper sense of his words.

(5:19)²⁵ refers to this very *truth* that this world “withers” like grass, while “every good gift is from above” (1:11, 17 – KJV).

Instead of a conclusion, we could say that the true biblical virtue of love consists of freely and consciously choosing to do *works* of love²⁶ within the framework of an eternal contract with God, which by itself sets the man free from any reasons for wrong loves, like bad desires, needs and worries, – so as there cannot be for him anything like *now or never* – since as an offspring of God, he is entitled to everything, and can make decisions based on long term value. The lover of God cannot be bullied by anyone into doing anything. Perhaps in this light, we can better understand why even the divine Lover Himself, Jesus, puts no pressure on the sinful woman, but waits for her to bring out the fruits of her love (at a time of her choice), so that then He would say, in the past tense: “She *loved* much”²⁷.

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²⁵ James gave such an example by his own powerful testimony that he made all the Jews believe the siege of Jerusalem was caused by his killing (ibid.).

²⁶ Or, works of *Gift-love*, as Lewis would put it.

²⁷ Like the thirsty man who would say: “O, how I *needed* this!” – satisfied by his glass of water.

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